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Washington State Department of Health  
Zoonotic Disease Program  
Local Health Support Section  
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- Questions about exposure to rodents  
in the workplace:  
Washington State Department of  
Labor and Industries  
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## RODENT CONTROL

# Taking Steps to Prevent Hantavirus

## WHAT IS HANTAVIRUS?

It is a virus that can cause a serious respiratory illness. It is spread by deer mice that are infected with the virus. Hantavirus was first reported in the United States in the spring of 1993 after an outbreak in the southwest. Through June 1999, 217 cases have been reported in the United States. Over 40% of the cases have been fatal. Twenty-one cases have been confirmed in Washington.

## HOW IS A PERSON EXPOSED?

Deer mice are the main carriers of hantavirus. Deer mice live in all parts of Washington, but mainly in rural areas. You can tell them by their white bellies. Infected deer mice spread the virus in their urine, saliva, droppings and in their nesting materials. The mice can have the virus without showing any signs of being sick.

A person may be exposed to hantavirus by coming in contact with droppings or with things that the deer mice have handled, eaten or lived in. Disturbing a nest of mice or sweeping up dry droppings can spread the virus through the air.

In the United States, there are no cases of the disease being spread from one person to another or by dogs and cats. But pets may bring infected mice into contact with people. It is possible that other rodents may also be carriers.

## HOW CAN I PREVENT HANTAVIRUS?

- Take steps to keep mice away from your home and workplace.  
This means removing food sources and nesting places.
- Be careful when cleaning the places where mice have fed, nested or left droppings. Read and follow the guidelines listed inside.
- Take precautions outdoors when hiking or camping.  
Read and follow the guidelines listed inside.

## KEEP MICE AWAY

### ■ Keep mice out of your house.

Plug up, screen or cover all openings into your home that a mouse might get through (bigger than 1/4 inch wide).

Use steel wool to plug holes around the base of buildings.

### ■ Use spring-loaded mousetraps. If you use poison bait, follow the directions carefully.

Wear gloves when handling dead mice.

### ■ Take away their food.

Don't store pet food uncovered or in open feeding dishes.

Store grains and animal feed in containers with tight fitting covers.

Use a plastic trash can with a lid for kitchen garbage and food scraps.

### ■ Don't give them places to nest.

Keep the area within 100 feet of your house clear of junk piles, debris or old cars where mice will nest.

Keep weeds, brush and grass cut.

### ■ Tightly cover outdoor garbage cans and raise them 12 inches off the bare ground.

### ■ Stack firewood, lumber and hay 12 inches off the bare ground and as far from the house as possible.

Use mousetraps near woodpiles and haystacks.

## CLEANING INFECTED AREAS

**Follow these steps if you are cleaning up places in your home where mice have fed, left droppings or nested:**

1. Wear latex or rubber gloves.
2. Mix a solution of 1 cup bleach to 10 cups water or use another disinfectant solution.
3. Do not vacuum, sweep or dust. This may spread the virus through the air. Use rags, sponges and mops that have been soaked in the disinfectant solution.
4. Thoroughly spray or soak any dead mice, droppings or nesting areas with disinfectant solution.
5. Wipe down counter tops, cabinets and drawers. Mop floors and baseboards.
6. Steam clean carpets, rugs and upholstered furniture.
7. Wash clothes and bedding in hot water and detergent. Set the dryer on high.
8. To dispose of contaminated items, including dead mice, put them in a plastic bag. Seal the bag and put it in another plastic bag. Seal the outer bag and put in your outdoor garbage can.
9. Disinfect or throw away the gloves you used.
10. When you are done, wash your hands and/or shower with soap and hot water.

**If you are cleaning out a building that has been closed up, such as a cabin, shed or garage, where mice have been living:**

- Air out the building for at least one hour by opening windows and doors.
- Leave the building while it is airing out.
- Wear gloves and a dust mask while cleaning.
- Follow the 10 steps listed above.
- Spray dirt floors with the bleach or disinfectant solution.

## TAKE PRECAUTIONS OUTDOORS

### ■ Avoid contact with rodents.

Do not feed them.

Do not disturb rodent dens or nests.

### ■ Stay out of cabins or shelters until they have been disinfected and aired out.

### ■ Pitch tents well away from garbage cans, woodpiles or other places that rodents live.

Avoid any areas where you see burrows or rodent droppings.

Use a tent with a floor.

Do not sleep on the bare ground.

### ■ Keep food and food scraps in tightly covered containers.

Put all trash in covered garbage cans.

### ■ Clean dishes and cooking utensils right after using them.

### ■ When harvesting crops or hay, wear gloves and protective clothing.



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If you have questions, contact:

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**Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team**

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